

operates. It is just regrettable that the Department of Education is one of the worst.

In the audits that the Congress requires various agencies to carry out, the Department of Education in 1998 could not even audit its own books. The books were so bad, so poorly kept, that they were just unauditible. And I remember the hearings that we held together, that the gentleman chaired, where we brought the Department of Education in and wanted to know where did the money go. We noted that they get billions of dollars, and we share the dream and the goal that these dollars should be spent on children in classrooms. We care about education and we want to see our children have the best resources, and really unlimited, if possible. And to a great extent that is possible, even with the money we are spending now. But the reality is not only do we know for certain that a tremendous proportion of the dollars that the American taxpayer spends never make it to the classroom, it is so bad that the Department could not even quantify that amount because it could not even balance its own books.

It is spending money, Mr. Speaker, without the ability to track these dollars and let the American taxpayers know what it has done with those funds, those important revenues. So that I think the real message is that waste, fraud, and abuse exists in the Department of Education. It is graphic, it is ugly, it is miserable, it is unfortunate, and we want to fix that. And first of all, the way we fix these kinds of problems is by admitting them, openly and publicly, by talking about them and trying to find out how we fix these problems.

The goal is not really to have more and better government. Our goal is to get resources to the children that matter most. I have five kids, three of them are in public schools right now. I know the gentleman has children as well that are in public schools, and we take this matter very personally, Mr. Speaker. Our goal and our mission is to fix government in a way that allows the money that the American taxpayers spend really get to the children we care about, the children that deserve a chance in America.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. If the gentleman will yield for a moment, I will just correct one thing. My children are in a parochial school. So that is a little bit different.

But if we are talking about reinventing, I go back to this other account that the gentleman and I have had some real frustration with, which is the grant back account. The gentleman and I have on occasion, may have called it, or I think others have referred to it, as a slush account. This is a \$700 million account. The General Accounting Office went in and took a look at it, and out of this \$700 million, which is supposed to be designated only for money that comes back from

schools that have misused grants and it goes into this account and then those schools can reapply once they get things straightened out, out of the \$700 million that is in this account, only \$12 million of it was there under legitimate circumstances. The rest of it just kind of happened to find its way there. And when GAO said, how did it get here, they could not say how it got there. And when they spent it, they could not say where they had the authorization or where they had actually spent the money.

Then, when we compare that definition of reinventing government, I mean where the real reinvention and the real excitement and energy in education is happening today, it is at the State level and it is our local schools who are integrating technology, who are focusing on the needs of their kids. I do not think my colleague was in the Bronx with me in New York when we went to Cardinal Hayes High School, but this is one of the toughest areas; and here is a school that has reinvented itself and is doing some great things. They are turning out some great students in one of the toughest areas of New York City. And there are local schools all over the country each and every day that are reinventing themselves.

A lot of times, when we have talked to some of these schools, they tell us that the only thing that is standing between them reinventing themselves to the extent that they would like to, to meet the needs of their kids, a lot of time it is Federal rules and regulations that say they cannot go where they want to go.

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So we have got a department in Washington that has reinvented an agency that cannot deliver. If the Vice President is really interested in reinventing education and reinventing government, what the Vice President needs to do is the Vice President needs to take a look at the reinvention and education that is going on at the local level.

We have been to 21 different States. That is where the excitement is. That is what the focus is on, kids and learning, rather than bureaucracy and paperwork.

Mr. SCHAFFER. Mr. Speaker, and that is the real message that I hope our colleagues will ponder, that we frankly do not look to the U.S. Department of Education, the Federal Government, to define the terms of quality in education across the country.

We do have 50 individual States, each a laboratory in and of themselves; and each that we see is free to be innovative, to weigh the risks of new programs and new ideas against the successful models and the record of their 49 counterparts and colleagues throughout the rest of the country. And States are in a better position to act more swiftly than the Federal Government is. States are closer to the people.

The elected officials are much more accountable than the bureaucrats down the street here from where we are here at the U.S. Department of Education. That is the front line. The States are the front lines of education reform.

And States differ. Some States have a more decentralized approach where local school districts are able to innovate each further at a more local level. Some States are a little more centrally controlled at their State capitals. But in no case should we ever not be willing to trust the future of our children and their ability to grow intellectually to a small group of folks here in Washington, D.C., over at the Department of Education whose goal today, facilitated by this centralized governing types down at today's White House, to collect this authority and power in Washington, D.C., to define the terms of quality, to define how a dollar will be spent in a classroom.

And of course, with the track record of the U.S. Department of Education, it is the last organization we should trust to get the Nation's precious resources and tax dollars to the children that we ultimately care about most.

This is an important topic for the whole country. The USA Today newspaper, I do not have the date on here, it was just a few days ago and I ripped this out of the bottom of the newspaper, this is a survey among Web users, and the top five problems in our society according to a survey of Internet users and of the people that they surveyed on the Internet, 37.7 percent identified education as the number one priority.

I contrast that with, again five priorities total, the next one was Government intrusion into people's lives. That was down at 10.2 percent. Then you have crime, political corruption, and rising health care costs, which trail just a few percents behind that. But given the huge number of individuals that responded, an overwhelming majority identified education as their top priority.

We are hearing this around the country that parents care about how much money they are spending on taxes, they care about the corruption and the lack of integrity we have seen in the White House over the last 8 years. They care about a strong national defense, they care about foreign policy, they care about the environment and health care and all the rest. But education repeatedly as a topic comes up as the number one concern among the people we speak with and have heard from as we travel around the country.

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, if we build off of how education is being reinvented around the country, recently my colleague and I were in Minnesota where they are talking about a plan that really reinvents some of their spending and focuses it around parents by giving them tax credits and tax deductions. So Minnesota is working on a reform plan.

Then we have been to Arizona, Michigan, California, at least three States